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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000988

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB AND INR

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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#)

MASS, IN, BM, BG

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH BORDER RIFLES CHIEF DISCUSSES BURMA,
INDIA BORDER SECURITY

Classified By: CDA Nicholas Dean. Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D)

Summary

¶1. (S) Major General Md. Mainul Islam, Director General of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), highlighted his commitment to reform and improving the professionalism of the BDR to Embassy officers on October 12. MG Islam outlined the current deployment of border observation posts (BOP) and the limitations BDR faced in interdicting illicit cross-border traffic. The Director General (DG) reviewed the Bangladesh-Burma border situation, reporting Burmese deployment of an additional light infantry division. MG Islam also discussed BDR plans to improve border security, including increased information sharing within the BDR and Government of Bangladesh (GOB), as well as with the Indian Border Service and U.S. agencies. He claimed suspected participants of the February 2009 mutiny would face disciplinary action under the BDR Act, which had a maximum punishment of seven years. The GOB was considering charging about 50 mutineers, suspected of murder and rape, under the Penal Code, which would include the death penalty for the worst cases. Providing assistance and training to improve the BDR's capabilities will enhance security along Bangladesh's porous border with India, which terrorists have crossed illicitly. End Summary.

BDR DG Committed to Reform

¶2. (SBU) Major General Md. Mainul Islam, Director General of the BDR, reiterated his commitment to implementing reforms and professionalizing the BDR in the wake of the February 2009 mutiny, during a meeting with Poloffs on October 12. MG Islam said he was coordinating the drafting of a new BDR Act that would revamp the organization, including incorporating reforms addressing some of the grievances that led to the mutiny. One such reform was increasing upward mobility for BDR personnel, providing three routes for advancement into the officer ranks rather than the current single route. The Act would also include authority to try BDR personnel via military court martial.

Burmese Actions along Shared Border

¶3. (C) The DG echoed the GOB's contention that Burma was building a network of fences along the border. MG Islam noted that the construction was well with Burma's territory

and did violate bi-lateral agreements allowing such construction as close as 150 feet from the demarcated border.

The new Burmese fence lines ranged from 150 ft to as much as five kilometers into their territory, depending upon terrain accessibility. When asked about reported improvements of Burmese runways, near the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Islam replied that he had not/not received reports of Burmese military aircraft flying patrols along the frontier. He added, "There is a big difference from parking a few MIGs at the airport to having planes in the air." His main concern was the addition of a second light infantry division near the border with reports of a third division also entering the region. The troop movements coincided with reports of Burmese roads leading to the Bangladesh-Burma border being improved. (Note: Local terrain is slow-go/no-go for motorized and armor units. MG Islam surmised the road improvements were to facilitate the positioning of artillery units supporting the infantry. End note.)

Manning Bangladesh's Borders

¶4. (C) MG Islam told Poloffs that an average distance of eight kilometers separate BDR-manned BOPs. This contrasted with an average of about 3.5 kilometers between Indian BOPs. His aim was to reduce the distance to five kilometers. MG Islam explained that four-man teams patrol the space between BOPs, but that it was still easy for smugglers and other illicit traffic to cross the frontier. To improve the BDR interdiction, MG Islam was seeking to improve BDR mobility by providing motorcycles to BDR patrols. The DG informed us

DHAKA 00000988 002 OF 002

that Japan might assist in procuring motorcycles. Poloffs suggested that four-wheeled all-terrain vehicles (ATV) might be a better alternative to motorcycles considering Bangladesh's terrain. The Director General also was seeking about 2.7 million USD from Parliament to establish BOPs to cover existing gaps along Bangladesh's border.

Enhancing Riverine Border Security

¶5. (C) The DG mentioned that he had met with BG Coast Guard officials to coordinate efforts in the Southwest section of Bangladesh, which has extensive waterways. Some of the waterways were too rough for BDR river craft to handle, so the Coast Guard would cover the areas not accessible by the BDR. MG Islam said he was coordinating with the Indian Border Service so that they would have Coast Guard points of contact and understand the role the Coast Guard played along the Indian-Bangladesh border. He also mentioned that he planned to deploy four houseboats within the Southwest waterways as floating BOPs. Smaller river patrol boats would deploy from the houseboats, which would provide both lodging and logistics support. The floating BOPS would extend the patrolling period for the patrol boats from one to two days to a week or more.

Information Sharing

¶6. (S) MG Islam said he intended to establish intelligence sections at both BDR and battalion HQs. He explained his goal was to increase the BDR interdiction effectiveness using organic intelligence sections as a force multiplier. The intelligence section at BDR headquarters would incorporate interagency coordination and include a counterterrorism component. He told Poloffs he wanted to improve information sharing with his Indian counterparts and with the USG. He also planned to expand the BDR's digital connectivity, which currently only reached out from BDR headquarters (HQ) in Dhaka to sector HQs. The DG wanted to push connectivity down to battalion HQs, which would give BOPs more immediate access to critical databases in order to validate identities and travel documents, such as Bangladeshi passports.

Prosecuting Mutineers

17. (C) In September, the GOB announced its decision to try BDR members who participated in the February mutiny under the BDR Act. The punishments under the BDR Act ranged from a fine of 400 taka (about \$6 USD) to seven years confinement. MG Islam said that about 1700-2000 BDR members might face charges for mutiny, although, he said, the number of suspects would likely increase. He told us he was discussing the possible destabilizing impact the punishments might have on the GOB. Islam told us that he was looking for a balance between justice and stability. He worried that dismissed members might be vulnerable to recruitment by smugglers, traffickers, and other illicit groups. The GOB would prosecute those who committed more serious crimes during the mutiny, such as murder, rape, and looting, under the Criminal Penal Code. Individuals found guilty under the Penal Code faced longer prison terms and possibly the death penalty, depending on the charges. The DG told us the GOB was considering charges for about 50 individuals, although the actual number charged would likely be less.

Comments

18. (C) Major General Islam, a graduate of the U.S. Army War College, was clearly focused on moving the BDR past the February mutiny. Often referring to the BDR as "his boys," he understood the need to quickly mete out justice and clear the shadow hanging over the BDR's personnel. Bangladesh's porous borders offer terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, the ability to transit in and out of India. Engaging the BDR with technical assistance to build-up its capabilities and professionalism would add to our efforts to deny space to terrorists.

DEAN